



Right in the Mainstreet

Dande: an Aruban tradition

Dande . . . a typical New Year tradition, bringing music and joy, that has existed for at least over 150 years in Aruba, "Dande" - which has probably been derived from the word "dandaré", meaning going from one place to the other - has traditionally consisted of a group of seven to nine persons, visiting from house to house with their musical instruments, right after midnight on New Year's day, to play songs of well-wishes to the families in Aruba.

Together with the Dande were a lot of other traditions and superstitions that were celebrated on New Year's day . . . Imagine it is 1883, one hundred years ago, at about 11:30 p.m., half an hour before the midnight of January 31st. At about that time in the Aruban house, the mother would be busy sweeping once more the already clean house, and filling the house with essence to do away with all the bad spirits of the old year. Everyone is dressed in his new suit. All doors and windows are opened and at about two minutes before 12 midnight, each family member stands outside, in front of the door, to "receive" the New Year. Each of them holds a coin in the left hand to live up to the superstition that "if the New Year finds you with a coin, you will gain more in the year to come".

After New Year is announced and congratulations are exchanged, the father followed by the mother and then the children, enter the house, with the right foot first. The children then knee on a pillow in front of their parents to receive their blessings. Then after the drinks, are served and all the fireworks (European) are thrown, the family is ready to receive the Dande

The most exciting moment of the celebration has arrived. One that brings music, joy and, hopefully, blessings for the New Year. Most families are more than eager to receive a Dande, at least one. When the group arrives everyone dressed in suits, one of the integrants knocks on a win-

dow (not a door), to take down the names of every family member. Then they stand in front of the door, outside of the house (never inside) and start playing (or as they say, "making the Dande cry" with the violin), asking God to bless the home and family members, calling them each by name. Of course, the singer has to take off his hat, for respect. The host usually throw some maney in the hat as a contribution for the high cost of the instruments. Once the Dande group has asked for everyone's blessing, it enters the house to play three dance songs. Before the Dande leaves to visit the next house though, they have to drink or eat that which is offered to them by the hosts. Often, the Dande groups would walk 15 to 20 miles to give a Dande. And this they would do until the 6th of January.



Although times have changed and traditions have evolved, the Dande has survived. To encourage the tradition, Dande festivals were organized about ten years ago. These festivals gave a real boost to the traditions, and are now a succesful part of the annual celebrations. The basic instruments used over a century ago are still used today: the violin (which has to be a little out of tune to sound right for Dande), the tambú and the wiri. Over the years, the guitar, maraca, cuarta, mandolin and (hand-) accordeon were added. Now, in the festivals, even the electric base is used.

Many are the theories as to the origin of the Dande. Some contend it is African, others that it is Latin-American, and still others that it is a combination of various influences. In any case, wherever Dande may have originated from, it has since long evolved into a genuine Aruban tradition. Dande is just that kind of familiar music, with a sentimental tinge, perhaps a little sadness for the year that has passed, and at the same time an expression of hope for the future

